

David Harris Flaherty Undergraduate Student Library Scholarship 2018 Recipient

By Emma Gillespie, Faculty of Fine Arts

Award-winning Essay

In my first year at the University of Victoria, I was assigned a research essay on a topic of my choosing for my English 135 class. I chose to write on Delegated Aboriginal Agencies, the Indigenous-founded and governed organizations that deal with many of the Indigenous foster and adoption cases in British Columbia. These agencies face numerous challenges, from discriminatory federal funding practices, to extremely heavy staff workloads, to tense and unproductive relationships with the Provincial Ministry of Child and Family Development. My essay focused on the flawed federal model of funding welfare organizations according to the number of children in foster care, encouraging the organizations to apprehend children from their biological families and place them in foster care rather than providing preventative services that would strengthen Indigenous families and communities. I argued that the Federal government must amend its funding model in accordance with the instructions of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, and that the next step in reconciliation is a set of child welfare practices that promises a better future for Indigenous children.

When I embarked on this rather ambitious project early in my first semester of university, my early research was quite overwhelming. A simple search on the Library website showed dozens of academic articles on Indigenous child welfare, in Canada and beyond. The task of focusing my research was by far the greatest challenge, as the scope of the topic is virtually endless.

The University library provided me with a wealth of related research from local academics on the topic of Indigenous child welfare in British Columbia. I referred to Graduate research from the UVic School of Social Work such as Kim Grzybowski's dissertation "Voices from Aboriginal child and family agencies in British Columbia: supporting Aboriginal adopted children with cultural planning" and UVic Law student Kisa Macdonald's article in the UVic Law Department's journal *Appeal: Review of Current Law and Law Reform*, "Customary Adoption in British Columbia: Recognizing the Fundamental Differences." The access I was provided by the Uvic library to local and current academic writing on my chosen topic was absolutely vital to the success of my research.

I was also able to compare BC's Indigenous child welfare practices to those of other parts of Canada, the US, New Zealand, and Australia by reading comparative research such as Terri Libesman's "*Decolonising indigenous child welfare: a comparative analysis*". Books such as Margaret D. Jacobs's "*A generation removed: the fostering and adoption of indigenous children in the postwar world*" provided biographical information on the global practice of European settlers adopting Indigenous children, and the impact this has on the breakdown of Indigenous cultural fabric.

My professor aided me in focusing my research and selecting a thesis that I could argue in a succinct essay. The UVic Library provided an outstanding collection of resources that gave me a great first experience as an academic researcher.

Thank you for your consideration of my application, and may I take this opportunity to thank the Uvic Library staff for their ongoing support in my and my peer's education.